6 Business Practices That Undermine Your Marketing Program and Ruin Your Reputation

By Trey Ryder

The quickest way to destroy your marketing effort and trash your reputation is with bad business practices. If you see yourself in the following examples, I urge you to change your behavior.

BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #1: Surprising your patient by adding unexpected expenses or fees to his bill. Personally, few things raise my blood pressure more quickly than unexpected charges -- or charges that exceed the estimate. Money is a hot button for lots of people.

**BETTER:** Never surprise anyone with issues relating to money. Discuss everything clearly and in advance. If the treatment recommendation should change, discuss immediately how that will change the financial picture between you and your client. Don't elect to sort it out later. When later gets here, you can bet that one of you will not be happy with the outcome. You prevent problems when you and your patient have a clear understanding about money -- up front!

BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #2: Don't pay bills until they are at least 90 days old. You probably know those who pride themselves in how slowly they pay their bills. As a result, they enjoy the least loyalty and respect from vendors.

**BETTER:** Pay bills within 48 hours of when you receive them. Your accountant may tell you I'm crazy, but few things improve your reputation and gain as much positive publicity as paying your bills right away.

When you don't pay your bills on time, vendors start grumbling around the community. They discuss clients who make them wait for payment in the same way dentists sometimes talk about their slow-paying patients. Sooner or later, this information gets around the community. The reason for your delay is irrelevant. When word hits the street that you are slow to pay, your reputation suffers. This is aggravated by the fact that people think all dentists are rich and can write a check any time they want. Vendors often conclude that if you haven't paid their bill, it's only because you don't want to. If you really want to generate the "Wow!" response -- and improve your reputation in your city -- pay invoices as soon as you receive them. As word gets out, you might find that more vendors want your business -- and that some vendors may give you a discount because you don't make them wait for their money.
BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #3: Keep employees in fear of losing their jobs. Do you like to crack the whip to "keep 'em in line"? Do you tell employees their year-end holiday bonus is that you won't fire them, at least for now?

BETTER: Keep employees happy and treat them with respect. Good employees are wonderful goodwill ambassadors. Plus, they stay at their jobs so you avoid recurring training costs. On the other hand, disgruntled employees undermine your marketing program and complain to everyone they see, spreading their poison all over town. If you cannot correct the underlying problem and turn grumbling employees into positive, enthusiastic employees, then replace them.

BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #4: Return phone calls when you get around to it. If you are slow to return phone calls, you could easily irritate the person who left the message. One reason is because the caller might be waiting for the return call, which might not come for several hours or even days.

BETTER: Return phone calls promptly. The first and best response is the quick response. Still, since you won't always be able to return calls quickly, explain to your patients how you handle return calls in your office. Train your front office to take messages in ways that reduce callers' frustration. This includes asking if the call is urgent, so he or she can give it a high priority, and asking if someone else can respond to the caller's request in your absence.

BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #5: Don't agree to buy anything until you beat up the other person on price. When you try to get the lowest price through haggling, you immediately earn a bad reputation. And while you may enjoy negotiating, vendors usually don't. A few years ago, I called graphic artists for a quote on preparing a new client's newsletter. The first graphics shop declined to bid, saying my client tightened the screws on price to the point where the jobs were no longer profitable.

BETTER: Don't haggle over price. Instead, when you call a vendor, explain that you do not have the time or desire to haggle. (Vendors like to hear this.) Then explain that even though you won't haggle, price remains an important consideration. Tell the vendor that you are requesting prices from several suppliers and that you will base your decision on the first quote from each. (This emphasizes the need for the vendor to give you the lowest price, and makes him aware that you will not accept a revised quote.) I use this method all the time. Sales reps appreciate that I won't haggle and they give me the lowest price on the first quote, which saves them and me a great deal of time.
BAD BUSINESS PRACTICE #6: Demand perfection and don’t stop until you get it. It’s easy to find fault -- and even easier to criticize. For many people, complaining is their national pastime. But constantly complaining and criticizing does little more than gain you a bad reputation.

BETTER: Show your appreciation at every opportunity. Tell people how grateful you are for their help. And for maximum impact, tell them in writing. I started sending thank-you letters eight years ago. They don’t take long to write. And the act of sending a letter is so far beyond what most people would even consider that the recipient and his employer are really grateful for the gesture.

I send letters for several reasons: First, it makes the person who receives it feel good. Second, the person who receives it remembers me. And third, in an effort to live up to the letter’s high praise, the vendor gives me excellent service in the future.

So take a few minutes to reward good service with a letter. You’ll really help the people who receive them, as noted in this adage:

"Expect people to be better than they are; it helps them become better. But don't be disappointed when they are not; it helps them keep trying."

When you improve your business practices, you erase negatives that undermine your marketing efforts. And if you fail to get rid of these arrows, someday you’ll find them in your chest.

Over the past 44 years, Trey Ryder has started and owned eight businesses and written marketing articles for national publications including Direct Marketing magazine. Trey has designed Education-Based Marketing programs for professionals and businesses of all types. Contact Trey at trey@treyryder.com or by phone at 928.468.1000 or visit his website at treyryder.com.

If you’d like to receive Trey’s free Education-Based Marketing Alert, send an email to trey@treyryder.com with “subscribe” in the subject line.